DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 577 CS 209 476

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TITLE Microcomputer Training for Faculty: A Humane Approach. A Progress Report.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the UCLA Conference on "Computers and Writing: New Directions in Teaching and Research" (Los Angeles, CA, May 4-5, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Computer Assisted Instruction; *Computer Literacy; English Departments; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Program Design; Skill Development; *Training Methods; Training Objectives; *Word Processing

ABSTRACT

The English department faculty training program at Purdue University-Calumet, Indiana, designed a program that would provide their entire staff with the skills necessary to use computer-assisted instruction and word processing to teach all levels of writing. Phase one of the program was a semester-long class designed for regular faculty, beginner level. During the first two weeks, faculty members were instructed in elementary word processing commands such as loading files or inserting text. In the next few sessions the group learned the remaining basic commands. Next, the instructor introduced two pieces of software: a dictionary and a punctuation and style checker. Faculty were then instructed to assume the role of student and use the program to create a 500-word theme. The last part of the course was devoted to teaching participants to run grammar and reading software. Phase two of the project was designed to introduce participants to advanced text processing, program modification, and additional representative programs that could be used throughout the writing process. Adjunct faculty were trained in phase three. If there were no time constraints, they repeated phase one. The alternative was to take an intensive short course, using a method similar to one used with composition students whose class met in the computer lab. (HOD)

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Microcomputer Training for Faculty: A Humane Approach
A Progress Report

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Until recently, those of us charged with teaching composition had "only" to worry about such matters as which combination of research and theory to base our instruction on, which rhetoric, handbook and reader to use, and whether or not to allow students to submit handwritten essays or require that all out-of-class work be typed. Today, however, many of us must add a new item to our list of considerations when we develop our syllabi for our writing courses: the computer. What role should it play in teaching composition? What can it do? What can't it do? How can we adapt it to our individual methodologies? Will it bite? What if it turns on us?

When we decided to undertake an English Department faculty training program at Purdue University Calumet that would provide our entire staff with the skills necessary to use computer-assisted-instruction and word processing to teach all levels of writing, we felt that the latter two questions might be very real to many of our colleagues, particularly those with no computer experience. We kept this foremost in our minds, along with other significant factors, as we explored appropriate methods and strategies that could be articulated into a workable structure. We knew that we wanted a program that would 1) help allay fears, 2) build confidence, 3) develop computer literacy, and thus, 4) set up an environment that would lead to collaborative efforts in integrating computers into writing instruction. The problem was how best do this? The following presents the model we devised and describes our progress to date.

Preliminary Considerations

Microcomputer use expertise among our regular staff ranged from none, to considerable, and all ability levels had to be accomodated. It seemed logical to address this by dividing instruction into two parts: beginning and advanced. This way we could first teach the basics to those who were inexperienced and then have them join with the more expert faculty for the second segment. Such a plan would avoid most of the problems of moving too fast for some, but not fast enough for others.

Interest levels would also vary. While we expected part of the group taking the first course to be highly enthusiastic, we knew that others might exhibit no more than casual to moderate interest. We had to keep this in mind in determining the program's specific content and its length.

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We wanted to provide enough substance, enough hands-on experience, and enough discussion time to motivate all participants sufficiently so that none would feel their time was being wasted.

Still another consideration affecting decisions about content and length, equally relevant to both the beginning and the advanced segments, was that our tenure faculty would be undergoing training in their "spare" time. It was imperative that we find a way to avoid making more demands on them than would be reasonable, and yet still provide them with enough exposure and practice to accomplish two things: helping them become competent microcomputer users and equipping them sufficiently to make intelligent decisions about using both hardware and software with tneir students.

One possiblility was to offer a short course that would present all of the instuction in a few sessions and then simply cut participants loose to master the skills to which they had been introduced. Such an approach would require the least expenditure of time for the participants. We rejected it, however, because it would risk concentrating too much instruction into too little time, a practice that tends to cause learners to become confused, especially novices. Furthermore, if the participants became unduly frustrated, that would violate the whole idea of a numane, non-threatening faculty development program. Our purpose was to help, not to alienate our colleagues. For similar reasons we also abandoned the idea of a short-course-with-follow-up format. Though some might do well with such an arrangement, we felt that others would not find it satisfactory. They would likely experience too much annoyance and eventually just quit--we had seen this happen in other computer training courses. Therefore, we decided that these and other problems could be best avoided if the courses ran at a more leisurely pace over two consecutive full semesters.

Before finalizing the plan though, one further concern had to be addressed: training the adjunct faculty. Since they teach a number of our Composition I and some Composition II courses, these faculty too would require instruction on integrating microcomputers into teaching writing. We decided we needed yet another course--one exclusively for them.

The outcome of these deliberations resulted in a three-part program for both regular and adjunct faculty, that over the course of a year, will train all participants to integrate writing into compostition instruction.

The Program

Phase One: Regular Faculty--Beginner Level

Phase One, now completed, is a semester-long class for tenure track faculty who have had little or no previous experience in using computers.

Fifteen participants were scheduled in groups of three for one instructional hour and one practice hour per week. They met in a small room that houses our faculty development IBM PC's, an arrangement that worked out well because it

fostered the kind of informal, relaxed atmosphere we sought.

During weeks one and two, faculty members were instructed in elementary word processing commands: loading files, moving the cursor, inserting text, deleting text using the backspace and the delete keys, and saving files. Prior to the start of the course, the instructor had put several pieces of writing on participants' file disks to be used both in class and during practice sessions. They also received two handouts: a summary of commands and an assignment sheet that led them through a series of reinforcement exercises. They were encouraged to do these activities during scheduled practice time when the instructor would be available to answer questions and smooth the way if they became confused. Having the instructor on hand at these meetings proved very helpful, especially through the early weeks, and was, in part, responsible for the success of the project. While participants were willing to work from handouts, as beginners they tended to make some mistakes. The reassurance and support that the instructor provided helped minimize the participants' frustratration. It also helped overcome the problem of erosion of self-confidence that can occur when learners attempt to master too much unfamiliar material too quickly.

In the next few sessions the group learned the remaining basic commands: moving words, sentences, and paragraphs; printing; and using formatting keys for tasks such as italicizing, underscoring, double-spacing, centering, and the like. In addition, they began creating and revising their own documents. In order to make this step as easy as possible and guard against document loss and the inevitible anger that accompanies it, the instructor recommended that all participants begin by bringing to class pre-written material to type onto the screen. As individuals indicated they felt secure enough with the program that there was little risk of losing any important text, they were advised to begin doing some of their own work directly on the microcomputer. At this point, some were ready to move ahead very quickly and wrote tests, memos, and papers, using word processing. Others were reluctant to put their full faith in the computer and continued somewhat longer on doing copying exercises. By the fifth week, however, all members of the group were facile enough to use the word processing program for their own purposes.

Next, the instructor introduced two pieces of software: a dictionary and a punctuation and style checker. Participants each selected a student paper which could benefit from such an analysis and typed it onto their file disks. Then they ran the programs to learn first hand what kind of help the software offers. At this point the instructor began broadening the empnasis of the course by encouraging discussion about how students could improve their writing by using word processing and analyzer programs such as these. Working with these checkers provided

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participants with many insights into the strengths and weaknesses of such programs and gave them a basis for discussing the pros and cons of using them with students.

In conjunction with running the spelling and grammar analyzers, participants learned to use the word processing program's search and replace features. Again, they had an opportunity to achieve both facility using these commands and opportunities to discuss ways in which these program features can aid students in revising and editing. They tried out a variety of techniques: abbreviating to save typing time and then replacing the abbreviations with the spelled out phrase; searching for repeated misspellings of a word and replacing them with the corrected word; searching for instances of repetition, then replacing or deleting as desired; and searching for instances of "be" and substituting action verbs in their place. By the end of this segment of the course, the group had learned to use word processing on a microcomputer, had run related software, and had begun to discover practical ways of implementing these materials in teaching composition.

During the following two weeks, participants worked with a composition program representative of those that are designed to guide writers through the invention, drafting, revision, and editing stages of the writing process. The instructor asked each person to assume the role of student and use the software to create a five-hundred word theme. They worked through each section, and in so doing, discussed the relative merits of the program, its limitations, and its adaptability to a variety of courses.

The last part of the course was devoted to teaching participants to run grammar and reading course software currently available for student use on our writing lab's Apple IIE's. They were encouraged to examine the programs and also to critique them. At the same time, the instructor introduced them to program modification of teacher-written courseware. This gave the participants an opportunity to see for themselves what we already have on hand that they can use with students, and it also gave them an idea of how programs can be individually tailored to suit one's own presentation style.

At the completion of Phase One, fifteen tenure faculty had had a semester's experience using software representative of that presently available to teachers of writing; in addition, they discussed implications for classroom application. Thus, they came away equipped with a sufficient degree of computer literacy to enable each of them to progress to more advanced work.

Phase Two: Regular Faculty--Advanced Level

Phase Two of the project, which will be conducted next fall, is a full semester course for all tenure track faculty. It serves to broaden the faculty's experience by building on the work done in the first phase. It introduces participants to advanced textprocessing, to program modification, and to additional representative programs

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which can be used throughout the writing process. This course too is structured to permit small group presentations in a relaxed enviornment.

During weeks one and two, participants will review the basics of word processing. This approach will provide a "refresher" for those who learned to use the program during Phase One, as well as an introduction to the program for those who are experienced in using other word processing software. A combination of coordinated command handouts and assignments will insure that both faculty groups cover the necessary material and reach the same general level of expertise. Those who have not previously run the spelling and punctuation and style checkers will be given an opportunity to do so. They can also run and evaluate the composition program introduced the previous semester.

The next two sessions will introduce the group to such advanced textprocessing techniques as using the merge feature, the glossary, and additional special format features. The focus will be on both personal skill development and classroom applications. Class time will be set aside for discussion and assignments will ask participants to develop strategies compatible with their instructional styles.

Classes five through twelve will be devoted to program modification techniques, using various teacher-written tutorial and drill programs. Participants will modify two different kinds of programs, using the information learned in class. The majority of the group have no programming skills, and it is unreasonable and unnecessary to ask them to undertake a task of that magnitude on their own time over the course of a busy semester. Therefore, the instructor will demonstrate step-by-step how to make adaptations. Then the participants will do their first modification as small group projects. The second program will be modified individually.

In the last four sessions participants will run and critique additional software, including composition, grammar and editing programs. Discussions will culminate in an assignment asking them each to create a syllabus for one of their courses that integrates the use of the microcomputer into teaching composition.

Phase Three: Adjunct Faculty

Phase Three is a course for our adjunct faculty, who teach several of our first and second semester writing sections. Due to time constraints, scheduling problems, and other such practical matters, it may not be possible to provide all of them with full semester instruction. Thus, we will repeat Phase One for those who can commit for the semester and offer an alternative program, Phase One-A, for those who cannot. This second group will be trained in a short-courst intensive, using a method similar to one employed effectively on this campus with composition students whose class met in the computer lab. Participants will receive a compressed version of Phase One, with hands-

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on instruction, follow-up assignments, and classroom instruction/discussion on how to use microcomputers as a tool in teaching writing. They will nave follow-up support during the semester, in the form of expert assistance and group discussions, to help insure that they too are not overwhelmed or frustrated as they try to implement what they have learned.

The Outcome

What will be the final outcome of our faculty developemnt program? If the success of our endeavor to date is any indication, and we believe it is, at the very least we will have trained both our tenure track and our adjunct faculty in basic computer skills. Tnis will put all of them in a position to make effective use of computers to teach writing. Additionally, we will no doubt find among this group a number who wish to go on to more advanced applications on their own. Some may become interested in program development, while others may turn their attention to curriculum implementation and classroom methodology. Whatever the case, we will be well prepared to use this new technology intelligently for the sake of our students.

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